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CEREBUS

RICK'S STORY

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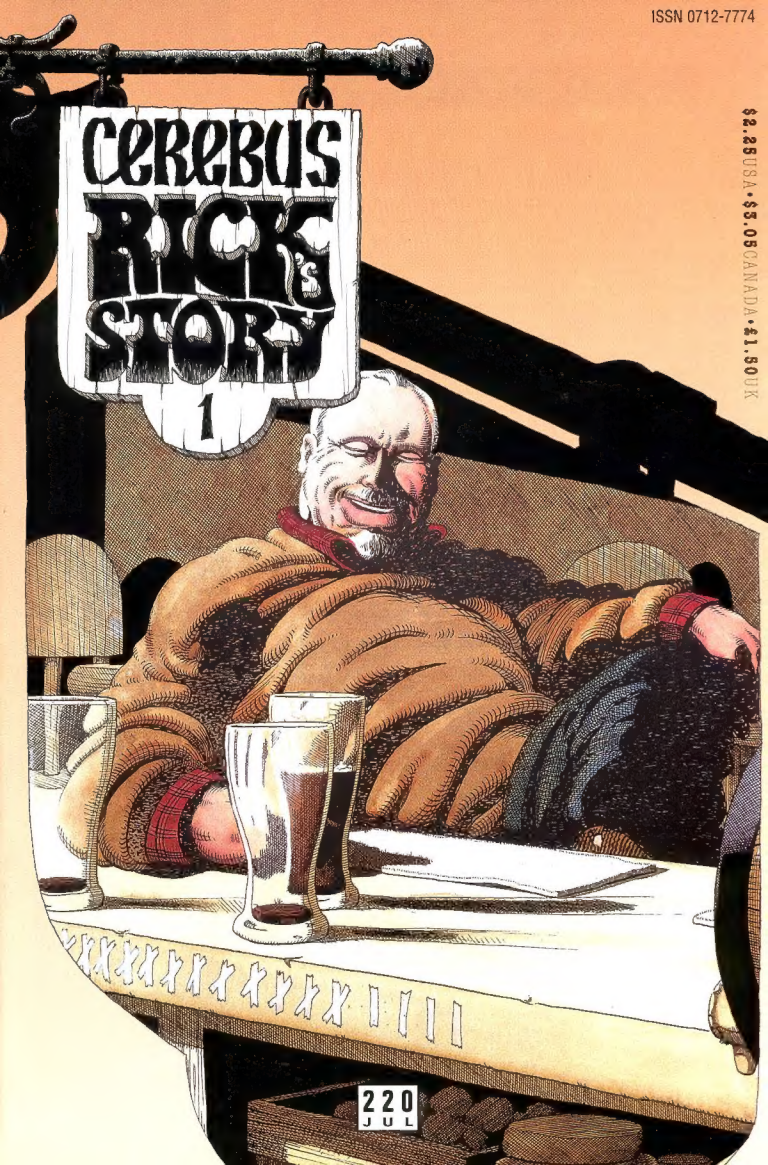

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220
JUL

E X C E R P T

These stories are the stories of such a democracy. Indeed, there would be no such stories had this nation not maintained its heritage of free speech and dissent, had it not fostered honest conflicts of opinion, had it not encouraged tolerance for unpopular views. Cynics may point to our inability to provide a happy ending for each chapter. But I am certain that these stories will not be looked upon as warnings to beware of being courageous. For the continued political success of many of those who withstood the pressures of public opinion, and the ultimate vindication of the rest, enables us to maintain our faith in the long-run judgement of the people.

And thus neither the demonstrations of past courage nor the need for future courage are confined to the Senate alone. Not only do the problems of courage and conscience concern every officeholder in our land, however humble or mighty, and to whomever he may be responsible—voters, a legislature, a political machine or a party organization. They concern as well every voter in our land—and they concern those who do not vote, those who take no interest in Government, those who have only disdain for the politician and his profession. They concern everyone who has ever complained about corruption in high places, and everyone who has ever insisted that his representative abide by his wishes. For, in a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, "holds office"; every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfill those responsibilities. We, the people, are the boss, and we will get the kind of political leadership, be it good or bad, that we demand and deserve.

These problems do not even concern politics alone—for the same basic choice of courage or compliance continually faces us all, whether we fear the anger of constituents, friends, a board of directors or our union, whenever we stand against the flow of opinion on strongly contested issues. For without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should not forget those acts of courage with which men—such as the subjects of this book—have *lived*. The courage of life is often a less dramatic spectacle than the courage of a final moment; but it is no less a magnificent mixture of triumph and tragedy. A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.

To be courageous, these stories make clear, requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all. Politics merely furnishes one arena which imposes special tests of courage. In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follows his conscience—the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow men—each man must decide for himself the course he will follow. The stories of past courage can define that ingredient—they can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this each man must look into his own soul.

Last Issue's Excerpt: *Of Human Bondage*, W. Somerset Maugham

CEREBUS
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RICK'S STORY
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(Cerebus 220 to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY

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RICK
'S
STORY

"PERSONALLY? I THINK YOU'RE A COMPLETE MORON..."
"...BUT MY DICK SEEMS TO LIKE YOU."
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
AND WHAT DID SHE SAY?
NO, SEE - HE NEVER ACTUALLY SAID THEM TO WOMEN. THEY WERE TO--
OH, AYE
PICK-UP LINES THAT HE WOULD JUST MAKE UP
OH AYE. CERBERUS THOUGHT...
OH, NO....
NO. IN FACT, HE USED TO SAY THAT ANY GUY WHO CHASED WOMEN WAS GOING TO GET THE PUNISHMENT HE SERVED.
HEH. "BUT MY DICK SEEMS TO LIKE YOU..."
HA HA HA HA
I KNOW, EH? HEH HE USED TO HAVE A HUNDRED OF 'EM
THAT'S NOT EVEN ONE OF THE FUNNIEST ONES...
LIKE YOU'D BE SITTING IN THIS TAVERN TALKING AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HE'D LOOK AROUND AND SAY--
"WHAT IS THIS? BRING-AN-UGLY-GIRL-FRIEND NIGHT?"?
HA HA HA HA HA
AND THEN I'D LOOK AROUND... AND IT WAS TRUE: ALL THESE ATTRACTIVE WOMEN WITH REALLY UGLY GIRL-FRIENDS
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
AND I'D START LAUGHING "!
LAUGHING...
LIKE:
"WHAT'S HIS PROBLEM?"
AND SINCE NOBODY COULD HEAR HIM THEY'D ALL BE STARING AT ME!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

"JUST FILL OUT AN ENTRY FORM"
"AND YOUR UGLY GIRLFRIEND COULD WIN -- A YEAR'S SUPPLY..."
"OF CRUNCHY AND DELICIOUS PUPPY CHOW!"
HAHAHAHAHA
"HERE'S TONIGHT'S UGLY GIRL-FRIEND WINNER! - - - - MISS GLADYS HEIFERMOCKER!"
"CONGRATULATIONS, GLADYS. DO YOU NEED ANY HELP GETTING YOUR PRIZE HOME?"
"OH, NO THANK YOU - I'LL JUST EAT IT HERE!"
HAHAHAHAHA
AND NOW EVERYONE IS "LOOKING DAGGERS" AT ME...
AND ME: SNICKER-HE WON'T STOP - GOTTA TELL HIM I'M GOING OUTSIDE TO PEE
I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO PEE - BUT I'VE GOT TO GET OUTSIDE I'M SO SNICKER EMBARRASSED
AN' HE GRABS MY ARM AN' HE GOES SNICKER: HE GOES:
"RICK! YOU CAN'T LEAVE NOW."
KRINK KRR INK
"YOU'LL MISS THE UGLY GIRL-FRIEND SING-ALONG..."
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
AN' HE GOES
HE GOES

AROOOOOOO
HAHAHAHA
AROOOOOOO
HEEHEE HEE SNICKER HAHA HAH HAHA
AND WHAT A MISTAKE THAT WAS.
AYE?
OHHH YEAH.
MY OLDEST AND DEAREST FRIEND AND MY BRAND SPANKING NEW GORGEOUS BLONDE TWO-YEARS-OLDER-THAN-ME AND A CANCER (NO VEGGIE) GIRL-FRIEND
AND JAKA SHOWS UP... AND SHE'S GOT HER "PAUNI FACE" ON...
WE'D ONLY BEEN TOGETHER-- WHAT? A WEEK? TWO WEEKS?
DOESN'T MATTER
MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE "PAUNI FACE"
ANYTIME SHE WAS NERVOUS W.C. "OH" SO I GUESS SHE WAS NERVOUS ABOUT MEETING VIKTOR
WHY I DON'T KNOW... BUT HERE SHE COOMES...
QUEEN-MY-SHIT-DOESN'T-STINK-AND-IF-IT-DID-IT-WOULD-SMELL-LIKE FUCKING-PERFUME
SKICH SKITCH
WOOOO BOY.

"UN SHONE TAY MUH SYUH"
I HAD TOLD HER VIKTOR SPOKE LOWER FELDAN
WHAT A MISTAKE THAT WAS.
"MAY ON GORE DUH MUNNA MWAH DUH BLAH BLAH BLAH"
SO VIKTOR SNICKER VIKTOR TAKES HER ROYAL FUCKING MAJESTY'S HAND, RIGHT?
AND HE SQUINTS AT IT --THEN HE LOOKS UP AND SAYS
LIKE
TEN WORDS IN LOWER FELDAN
AND BOOM!
JAKA PICKS UP HIS PINT-- DUMPS IT ON HIS HEAD...
HAHAHAHAHAH
AND THEN SHE TURNS TO ME AND SHE SAYS:
"RICK?"
(LIKE SHE HAD ASKED ME A QUESTION?)
(AND I WASN'T ANSWERING FAST ENOUGH?)
AND SHE TURNS ON HER HEEL
AND SHE WALKS OUT.
WITHOUT.
SAYING.
ANOTHER.
WORD?
AND ME!
I JUMP RIGHT OFF OF MY BARSTOOL
(EXCUSE ME)
MY BARSTOOL AND GO RUNNING AFTER HER
JUST LIKE A--
LIKE A--A

AROOOOOOO
HA HAHAHAHAHA HAHA
OH YES. HAHA JUST LIKE THAT.
THANKS.
UH-HUH?
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP

THE NEXT NIGHT, WHEN Jaka had gone to work, I went looking for Viktor and found him in his usual spot. I pulled him around on his bar stool to face me.

"*What* did you say to my girlfriend?" I demanded, shaking with rage.

He looked me up and down — once — a little curious and very much amused.

"Did you ask *her*?" Half his face was smiling.

"No," I answered, indignantly.

"Then," he winked, "you don't really want to know, *do* you?"

I swung my fist at his head with all my strength. He caught my wrist and twisted it slightly, enough to put me off balance and hold me at eye level.

"You're out of your league, son," he said in a pleasant tone of voice. "You're out of your league with *me*," he bent my wrist just enough to emphasize his point, "and you're out of your league with your pretty little dancer."

I tried to stare him down, but he knew he was right. When we both knew he was right, I had to look away.

"What am I going to do?" I asked.

"She's basically an unhappy person," he said. "With the unhappy ones you've got to be happy enough for two. You're a naturally happy person and as long as you stay that way, you'll do fine."

He waited for that to sink in. I nodded.

He let go of my wrist, and I sank onto the bar stool next to his.

"Right now, you're going to go home and tell her that you found me and you forced me to tell you what I said to her. You're going to tell her that I told you. And you're going to tell her that when I told you, you told me that you never wanted to see me or talk to me again."

I looked up at him.

"She's still..." he searched for the appropriate verb, "...*measuring* you. Telling her *that* should get you off on the right foot. Don't tell her you tried to hit me. She wouldn't like that. After that, just be happy every damn minute of your waking life and you've got her for as long as you want her."

He waited for *that* to sink in. I nodded.

"You're welcome," he said.

I laughed. "Thanks."

He stuck out his hand and I shook it.

"I'll still see you around, though," I said. "This isn't..."

He shook his head. "You never want to see me or talk to me again. If you try to put one over on your pretty little dancer, she'll see through you as if you were made of glass."

It seemed inconceivable that I would never see Viktor again. I tried to think of some way around it. I don't know how long I sat there thinking about it. I looked up at him.

"As if you were made of glass," he repeated.

I nodded and got up to leave. My feet seemed encased in cement.

"If you screw up," he said, "and she decides to leave you — stay away from places like this, and stay away from booze. Some people can handle it and some can't. Take it from me. You can't."

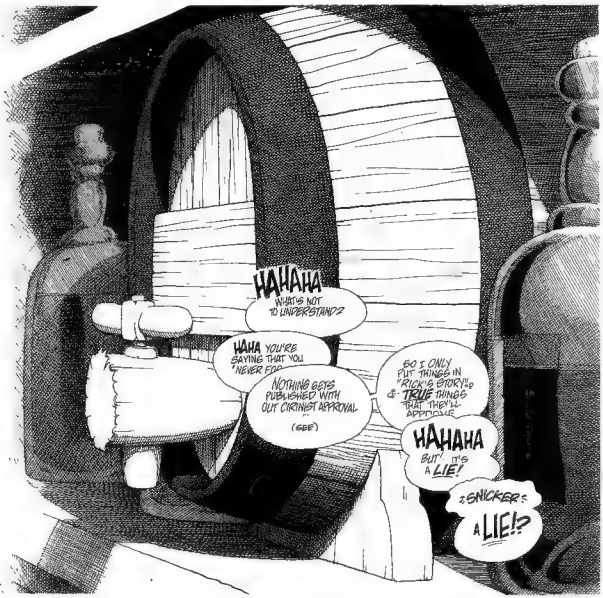
We shook hands again. "Goodbye, Rick," he said. "Don't forget what I told you."

"I won't. Goodbye, Viktor."

And I never forgot the advice Viktor gave me.

?
=heh=
=heh=
=HEH=
I SAID I NEVER FORGOT HIS ADVICE...
I DIDN'T SAY I FOLLOWED IT

HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA


HAHAHA
WHAT'S NOT TO UNDERSTAND?
HAHA YOU'RE SAYING THAT YOU "NEVER FEEL"
NOTHING GETS PUBLISHED WITH OUT CHRIST APPROVAL
(GEE)
SO I ONLY PUT THINGS IN "RICK'S STORY" & TRUE THINGS THAT THEY'LL APPROVE
HAHAHA
BUT' IT'S A LIE!
SNICKER
A LIE!?

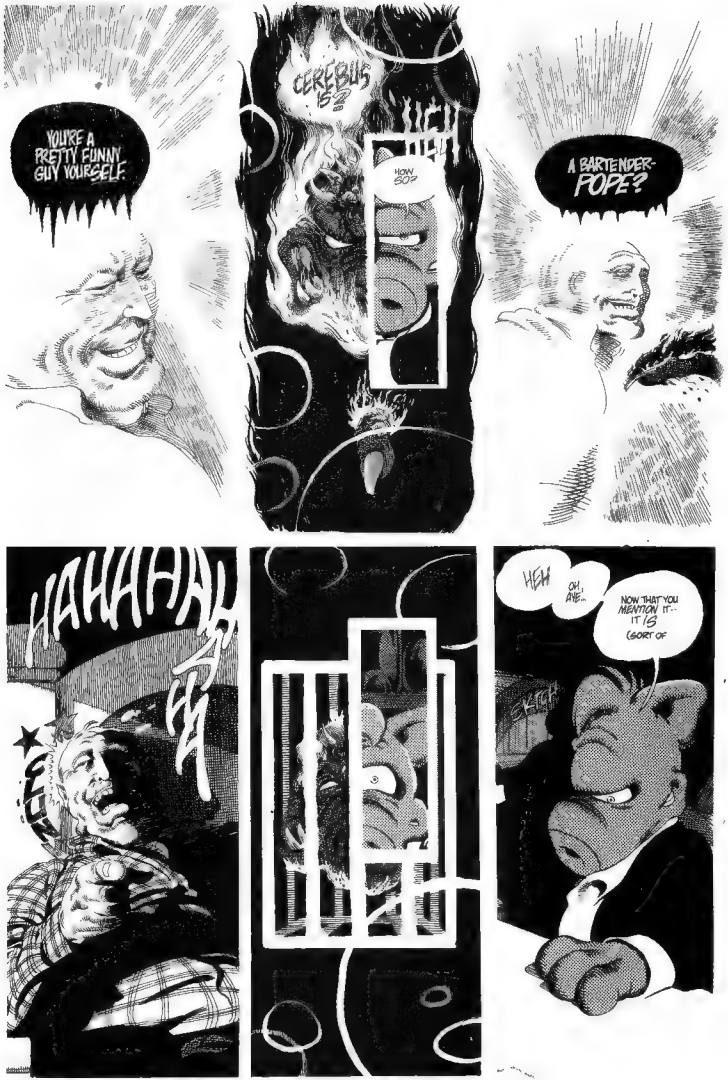
SAYING THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SHOULDN'T DRINK?!
THAT ISN'T A LIE. THAT'S THE TRUTH!!
OH DYE! THAT PART'S TRUE.
THAT'S WHY RICK'S STORY IS GOING TO BE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL READ OF ALL TIME.
THE PART THAT THERE ARE--
BECAUSE EVERY WORD IN IT IS GOING TO BE TRUE.
BUT YOU--
EVERY WORD.
BUT
BUT YOU DRINK LIKE A FISH.
?
HOW DO YOU MEAN
?!
YOU DRINK A LOT AND YOU DRINK REALLY FAST!
NO NO NO
THIS:
SSIP
IS NOT DRINKING FAST.
THIS:

OINK
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
PANT
GASP
WHENEVER SHE'S AROUND
GASP
HOW CAN A WOMAN BE SO BEAUTIFUL AND SMART?
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA

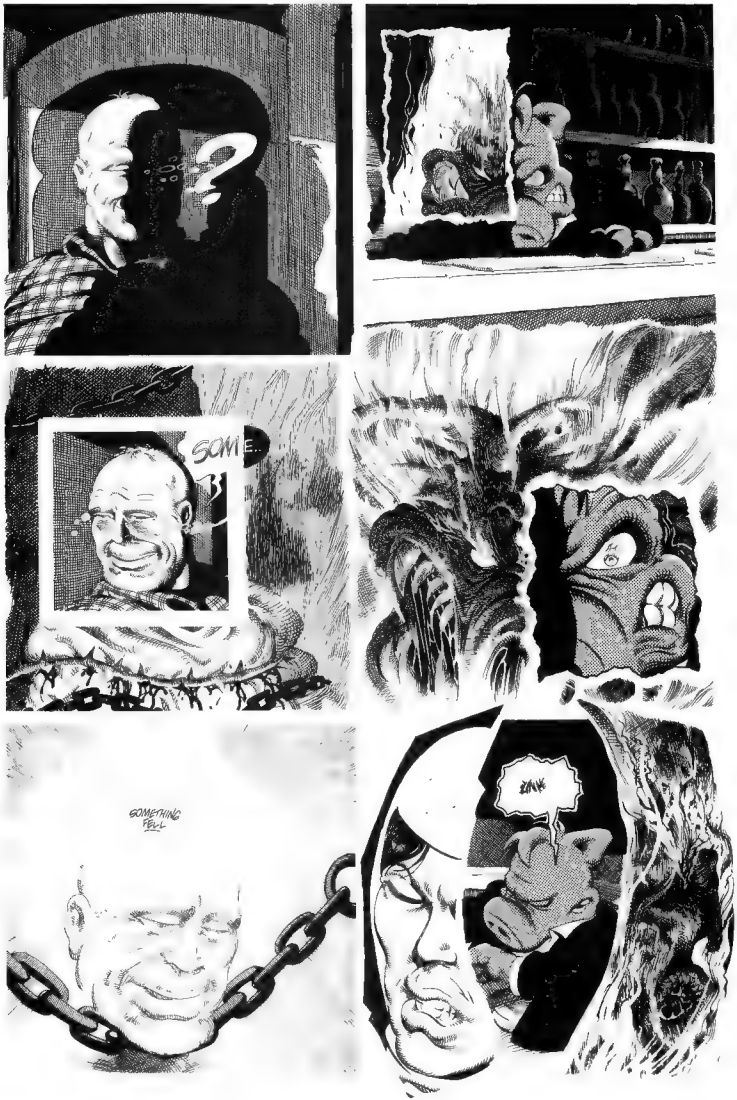
HAHAHA
HAHA!!
WHOA!
HA-HEH-HEH-HEH
WHAT
I...
I THINK I'M - I'M
HAVING A--
A$$
?
WHAT...
AN--
"OUT-OF-BEER" EXPERIENCE
HAHA
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
C'MON GET UP
YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YERSELF
ROLLIN' AROUND ON TH' FLOOR
LAUGHING AT THE PLIGHT OF THE
FERMENTATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED

SLEVE FORGET ABOUT IT "TO BE RARE" AND ALMOST ALL WOMEN BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AND I'LL TELL YOU WHY.
SEE - BEAUTIFUL WOMEN KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE TRUTH! BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING IN THE WORLD THAT IS TRUER - MORE TRUTHFUL THAN A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN SAYING "NO" THEY'LL "KNOW" AS SOON AS THEY KISSED - THAT IT DOESN'T JUST CONTAIN THE TRUTH - IT IS THE "KICK'S STORY" TRUTH - - -
AND THEY'LL ALL COME RUNNING (AGAIN MINE FIRST!) "NO SIGN MINE FIRST!" "LOVE KICKS STORY" (THEY'LL SAY) "THIS SO TRUE!" AND NO ONE BELIEVES THAT'S WHAT WILL HAPPEN BUT IT WILL JUST BLIND LIKE I SAID, IN MY DREAM... CHRISTMAS WILL TRY AND READ BUT IT'S GOING TO LIKELY EXPLODE (SEE) BOOM!
"WE DIDN'T EXPECT THIS" THEY'LL SAY "WE'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS" AND THEN "WHY THE CELLO AND THE HARP" THIS WON'T BE ENOUGH! WE'LL NEED THE WHOLE SYMPHONY! PEOPLE WILL SEE THEM IN THEIR DREAM
SO.
AT THE FIRST FEW TIMES I WON'T EVEN BE ABLE TO SIGN ONE AUTOGRAPH - THE CHRISTIES WILL BE CLIPPED OUT IN ONE PIECE BUT MY CLOTHES WILL BE RIPPED AND CLUMPS OF MY HAIR WILL BE MISSING. BUT FUNKY FINAL" EXCUSE ME "BUT YOU WERE RIGHT AND THEY'LL SAY "I'M DON'T BELIEVE YOU." THEY'LL AND THEN THAT'S WHEN I HAVE A LOT OF SECURITY THE FUN STARTS BOY
EVERY NIGHT A DIFFERENT TIMEPEN AND A DIFFERENT PARTY
BEAUTIFUL WOMEN SURROUNDING ME. LAUGHING AT MY JOKES RUBBING AGAINST ME I'LL BE NICE TO ALL OF THEM CAUSE I'M NICE GUY AND BESIDES THAT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO PICK THE ONE I MAKE HER THE NIGHT AND WHEN I FIND HER - FUNKY EXCUSE ME ONCE I PICK HER
I'LL JUST WHISPER IN HER EAR "MEET ME IN THE ROOM ON THE RIGHT AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS..."
OR "I'M THE GUY FROM THE 2ND FLOOR WHEREVER IS I'M STAYING"
AND (both kids) IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO SAY "DELUXE ACCOMODATION"
(BROTHER)

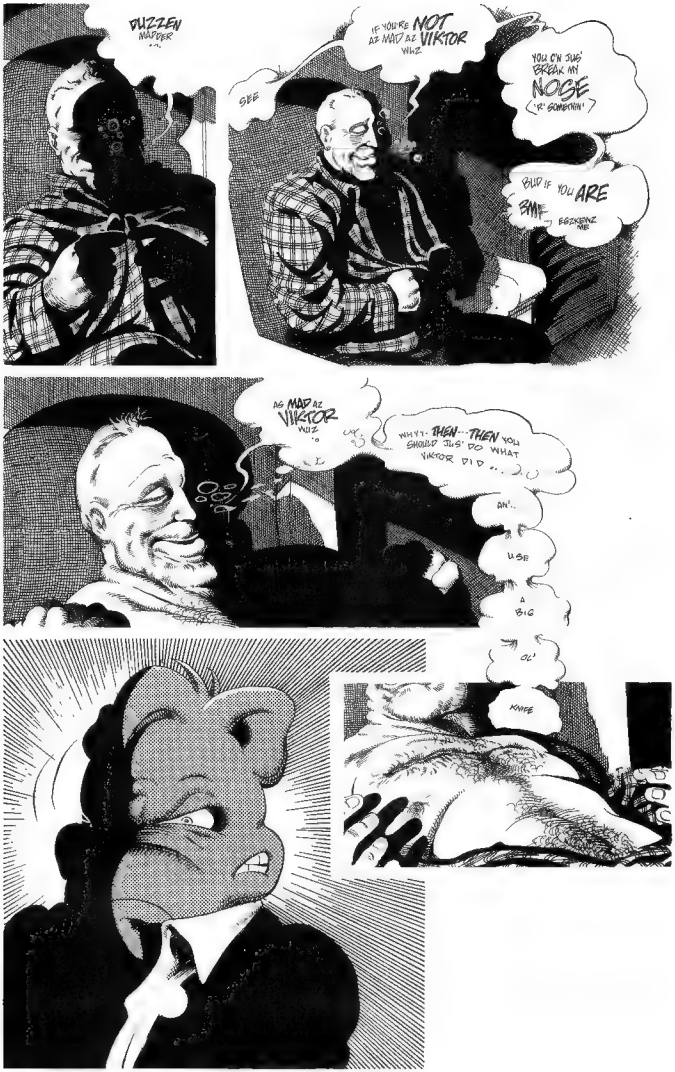
"BOBBING ON BOBO"?
SMACK
SHE'LL BE BOBBIN' ON BOBO...
HA HA HA
HA HA H
?
YOU'RE A PRETTY FUNNY GUY, RICK...

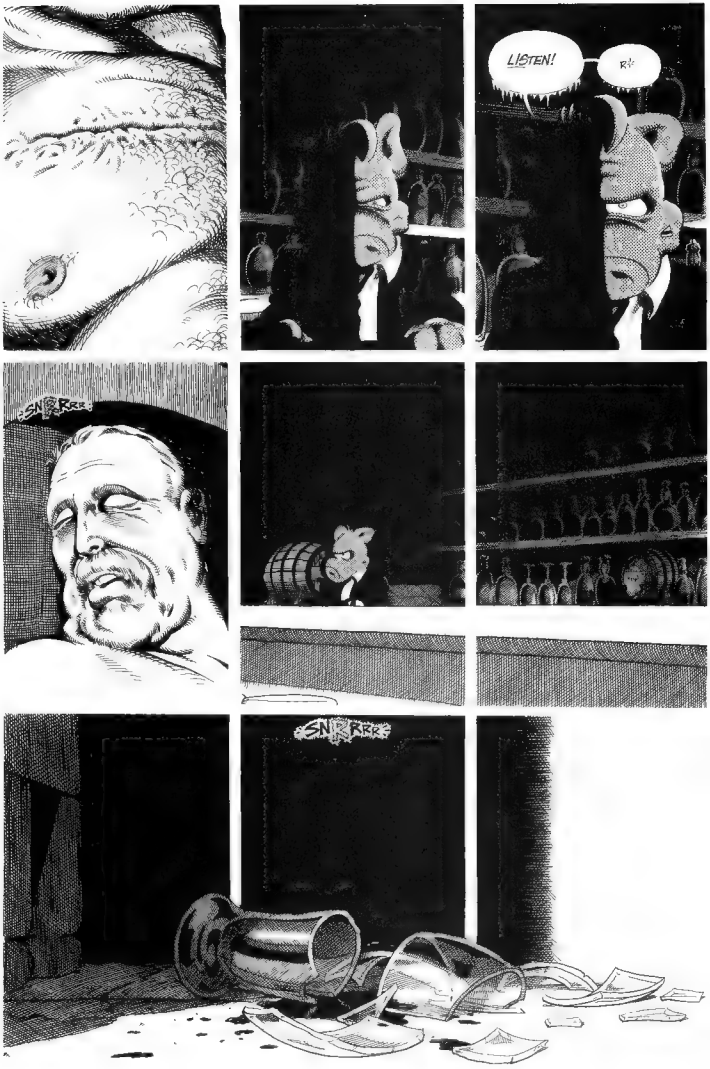

YOU'RE A PRETTY FUNNY GUY YOURSELF.
CEREBUS IS?
HOW SO?
A BARTENDER-POPE?
HAHAHA!
HEH
OH, AHB...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT-- IT IS (SORT OF
SKETCH

"THY ROD AND THY STOUT THEY COMFORT ME."
HEY!
HAHAHAHAHAHA
SH-
SURE...
HAHAHAHAHA
SURELY GUINNESS AND MIXERS SHALL
HA


SOM...
SOMETHING FELL
SMK

TH' TRUTH HURTZ
ANH?!
ANH?
C'MON
C'MMON OVER 'ERE AN' BEAT TH' SHID OUTTA ME
C'MAAAN
IT'LL MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER
WOULD BEING A BARTENDER
POPE.
MMPH
NOT TOLD THAT'LL CHANGE ANYTHING
RIGHTZ
I MEAN
YOU CAN BEAT ME UP
BUD YOU CAN'D BEAT TH' TRUTH UP
RIGHTZ
I CAN'D CLOSE MY EYES HON
MAD.
YOU'RE BLEEDING


BUZZEN
WADDER
SEE
IF YOU'RE AS MAD AS VIKTOR WHIZ
NOT
YOU CN' JUS' BREAK MY NOSE ('R' SOMETHIN')
BUD IF YOU ARE
BME
EBZKBENZ ME
AS MAD AS VIKTOR WHIZ
WHY?- THEN... THEN YOU SHOULD JUS' DO WHAT VIKTOR DID ...
AN'..
USE
A
BIG
OL'
KNIFE


LISTEN!
R!
SNORRRK
SNORRRK

FROM HELL

Well, since you invite me to correct you on your assumptions regarding how I see you, it would be rude of me not to. Whatever Dr. Gull's notions of an eternal war between the rational male solar force and the irrational female lunar force might lead one to suppose, this is not my own point of view. I tend to see both forces as elements in a far wider dynamic balance and tend to shy away from polarised positions such as Sun vs. Moon, Man vs. Woman, Christianity vs. Diabolism, Lobo vs. Wolverine, and so on.

Admittedly, I do have several bones...whole war fields full of bones, in fact...to pick with organised religion of whatever stripe. This should be seen as a critique of purely temporal agencies who have, to my mind, erected more obstacles between humanity and whatever notion of spirituality or Godhead one subscribes to than they have opened doors. To me, the difference between Godhead and the Church is the difference between Elvis and Colonel Parker...although that conjures images of God dying on the toilet, which is not what I meant at all.

What I'm saying is that, to me, organised religion seems to be an accumulation of dead ritual, lifeless dogma, and largely fear-driven belief that has built up around some original kernel of genuine spiritual experience. From what I understand of the original Essenes, for example, they were Gnostics. That is to say, their spirituality was based not upon faith or belief but upon personal apprehension and knowledge, or *gnosis*, of the powers at work in the Universe. They didn't *believe*. They *knew*. If there ever was such a historical personage as Jesus Christ, and if this person did have a group of Apostles around him, they were not acting from belief either. Saul/Paul had the heavenly searchlight turned upon him during his day trip to Damascus. Pentecostal Fire danced on their tongues. Thomas...a pure-bred I'm-From-Missouri Gnostic if ever I heard of one...even put his hand in the wound of the resurrected messiah. Gnosis...personal knowledge and experience of the spiritual...I have no problem with.

What I do have a problem with is the middle management who have manoeuvred themselves between the wellspring and those who thirst in the field of spirituality just as efficiently as they've done it in every other field of human endeavour. It seems to me that when the blueprint for the modern Christian faith was first sketched out by the Emperor Constantine and his marketing department, it was constructed largely to solve a couple of immediate Earthly problems that Rome was faced with at the time. They had a city divided by different theological factions, the largest and noisiest probably being the early Christian zealots. Then there was the cult of Mithras, which was smaller but which included the bulk of the Roman Military. Finally there was the cult of Sol Invictus, the undefeated Sun, which was relatively small but very popular amongst the merchant class.

Constantine's posse came up with a composite religion to unite Rome: Christianity would incorporate large chunks of Mithraism, including the stuff about being born in a cave surrounded by shepherds and animals on the 25th of December, and would make concessions to the cult of Sol Invictus, the Undefeated Sun, by sticking a big Sun-symbol behind the messiah's head in all the publicity handouts. This is politics.

The effect in spiritual terms is to move the emphasis away from any genuine personal spiritual experience. Whereas for the original Gnostics such a personal knowledge of and direct communication with the Godhead was the cornerstone of their spiritual life, after the priesthood moved in the basic proposition was vastly different: "You don't need to have had a transforming experience yourselves, and in fact neither do the priesthood need to have had a transforming experience. The important thing is that we have this book, about people who lived a long time ago, and *they* had transforming experiences, and if you come along on Sunday we'll read to you about them, and *that* will be your transforming experience." This sounds to me like a co-opting of the divine impulse — a channelling of the individual's spiritual aspirations into a mechanism for social regulation.

So, no, I'm not a big fan of organised religion of any kind.

On the other hand, I have nothing but respect for your recent involvement with Christianity*, although it was news to me. Stripped of the dogma and the strictures of organised religion that have grown up about it, I have a great deal of sympathy for the story at the core of Christianity. Judaeo-Christian symbology and concepts make up a significant part of magical thought, and my own workings have touched upon some of these areas with a fierce intensity. I won't bore you or your readers with the rambling details, but one of my investigations into the Qabalah involved a vision of the Mysteries of the Crucifixion, and it goes without saying that something like that certainly leaves an impression. I would imagine that my personal notion of Jesus is possibly a great deal more immediate and real than that of a great many people who would profess to be practising Christians.

I suppose this is how I would define the relative definitions between our positions in terms of language and linguistics: As I see things, the underlying spiritual

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** Dave's footnote: I don't consider myself really "involved" with Christianity. In part three, I should've drawn a sharper distinction between my high regard for the "Lamb of God" Jesus of John's Gospel, as distinct from the "Son of Man" Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke — and likewise clarified the fact that I consider the former incarnation to be a less heretical one than the three latter incarnations; but that I consider all four to be timely, inevitable, but nonetheless regrettable Judaic corruptions. I agree with Alan's views on theological "middle management."*

landscape of all the world's religions and belief systems is the same territory, just as a canine quadruped is essentially the same animal the world over, whether we choose to label it *chien* or *hund* or *dog*. As with dogs, so too with gods. All religions and beliefs are in a sense language systems, a range of symbols and icons with which we attempt to give form to the infinite and formless. Just as with language, most belief systems have their own unique beauty, their own advantages and drawbacks. In its purest form, Christianity is a very moving and powerful holy language indeed, and I sometimes like to speak it, to frame the Universe in those terms. I don't see magic as being something that is in opposition to Christianity, Islam, or even secular Humanism. I see all of these forms as being languages, while I see magic as being more akin to linguistics, the science of languages. Note that I don't imply that magic is necessarily a superior form of study because of this, any more than I'd look down on you for learning Russian while I was taking a linguistics course.

Also, once you move aside the symbols and look behind them, we'd probably find that our viewpoints had more in common than one might suppose. The serpent deity that I have a particular affinity for is understood to be the serpent entwining the tree in Eden. According to the numerological system of Gematria, the serpent in Eden and Jesus Christ have an equivalent value; they are in a sense understood to be the same thing. This was the basis for the belief of the early Gnostic Ophite Christians, who believed that Jesus was a form of divine, illuminating energy called the Christos and that this energy was identical to the divine, illuminating serpent energy known as Kundalini. You might not find the idea very palatable, but when my mind is focused upon my snake deity/imaginary friend, then it is at least in part focused upon that aspect of the serpent that is Jesus. In a sense, the snake is Jesus in another language: the redeeming solar force that brings light and knowledge, that rises again from its own sloughed-off skin. Thus, I imagine that most of the differences between our outlook may be similarly differences of language. At any rate, we can certainly agree to coexist peacefully. If you don't burn me at the stake, I won't sour your milk or give your offspring a clubfoot.

As for my relationship with the comics industry and comics medium…which are, as you observe, two different things…then I'd have to say that while I obviously still have a strong relationship with comics in all their aspects, that relationship has changed and modified itself over the years. Given that the comics field itself had changed so radically during the same period, this isn't really surprising. Something has happened, and I don't think that any of us have quite taken it in yet. Parameters have changed and paradigms have shifted. My view on things, while probably egocentric and worthlessly subjective, is probably as follows:

I think something happened in the middle eighties. Basically, all of our dreams came true and turned out to have been small dreams after all. I've been involved with comics one way or another since my days on the peripheries of the British comics fan scene in the late sixties, and the dream was always pretty much the same, with minor seasonal variations. The idea was that we all recognised that comics were as noble and valid a form of art as anything else, that they didn't have to be aimed solely at kids, and that if we were only given a chance, then everybody else would see this too. Comics would be given the serious public and critical attention that they deserved, and then…well, and then everybody would live happily ever after, I guess. Something like that. Mostly, our fantasies didn't get that far. Virgins fantasising about first coitus, we only took our dream to the point of orgasm. We didn't waste time on thinking about avoiding the wet spot afterwards or what we were going to say to each other in the morning. And now it's morning.

The middle eighties was when comic books finally got laid. Media attention. Frank Miller in *Rolling Stone*, MTV. *Maus* cops the Pulitzer. *Watchmen* on University reading lists. The style and music press raving about *Love & Rockets*. Fuck, man, we had the "Cerebus-the-Aardvark Party" running in British elections in '88. Reason tottered on its throne. Everybody was on Top of the Pops. We got everything we ever asked for, just as one often finds in real life or the better fairy stories, and just like in real life or the better fairy stories it turned out to be shit. For a few years there, everything we touched turned to gold, and now what the fuck are we going to do with all this gold? All this shit? With honest and sincere effort, we made comics what we wanted them to be: as popular as any other 20th-century medium. As respected as any other 20th-century medium. What on earth were we *thinking?*

The comics medium, its pure and platonic essence, remains unchanged by the above. It is only our relationship to it that has changed. Much of what provided the drive and motivation for that Darwinian struggle up from the gore-rich mud of the fifties to the evolutionary pinnacle of the eighties turns out to have been delusion. The beautiful room, to borrow a phrase from author Edmund White, is empty. Our Darwinian view of a steady but sure upwards progress and development has been superseded by catastrophe theory. Put crudely, catastrophe theory states that it really doesn't matter how bloody evolved or fit for survival you are if you happen to be under a big enough mudslide, a falling comet, or a long enough ice age. With a big enough wipe-out, God or the DNA simply has no choice but to slowly rebuild by diversifying whatever few fragments of life managed to survive the destruction.

Our vision was limited. Our reason for doing comic books…to elevate the medium to its proper cultural position…has disintegrated upon accomplishment under the weight of realising that the culture we were trying to find our place in is no culture at all. We need a new reason to carry on doing this stuff, a reason that is unconnected with fad, fashion, and the myopic short-term concerns of the industry. We need to create good comics with no social agenda, no goal that is based upon contemporary notions of success. In the course of a twenty-five-year (?) monsterpiece like *Cerebus*, you yourself have seen the comics industry shift and fluctuate more than most, and yet *Cerebus* has a constancy that suggests that the work itself is the most important thing, rather than the work

viewed in relation to the comics field. In fifty years, I doubt that anybody will be much interested in, say, the relationship of Dave Sim's *Cerebus* to the late-eighties comic-book self-publishing phenomenon. What they'll be interested in is *Cerebus* itself, the fact that it was created, was brought to fruition over such an astounding period of time. They will be interested, in short, in the timeless elements of art that are undoubtedly in the work, rather than the work's relationship to the comics field of its day.

The work itself is the only thing. *From Hell* was created with no thought to how the comics industry might receive it, or of any effect it might have on the medium. It had no agenda and simply was itself. *Cerebus* is the same, as are a number of the other fine titles that currently grace the medium. It seems to me that our only course of action can be to let the comic-book medium be its own motivation, so that our motivation is simply to produce good and enduring comic books of whatever stripe with no aspirations for the medium beyond that. The work will speak for itself, and if what it says has any profundity then it will endure. We should not concern ourselves with anything further.

As for where this leaves me, I find myself currently close to the end of one major personal cycle that includes the eight or nine years of *From Hell*, the five years spent on *Voice of the Fire*, *Lost Girls* (which approaches completion), a couple of years on *A Small Killing*, *Big Numbers* (which may achieve completion as a television series sometime soon), and various other things. The work for Image and Extreme has been very enjoyable, lucrative enough to finance the less commercial projects (see above), and hopefully of some small use in the struggle to reinstall proper story values into mainstream comics. I imagine that I'll be involved with more of this stuff for at least the immediate future, and it's something I'm looking forward to. Something with a little more finesse but still very much in the fun/adventure ballpark is this *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* project that Kevin O'Neill and I are putting together.

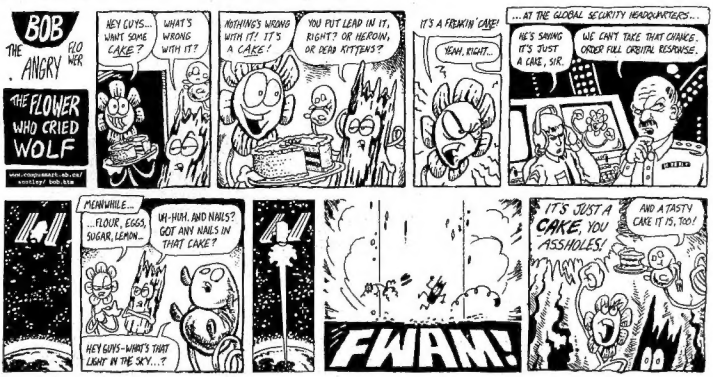
As far as strictly serious comic-book work goes, I'm probably going to coast for a few months before committing myself to another major work. I have an idea for a lengthy and utterly non-commercial history of the development of magic, in step with the development of language, consciousness, art, and culture. It would be nine volumes long, and I'd be working on it with fellow occultist Steve Moore (no relation). Maybe nine different artists working on it. Nothing decided as yet. Beyond that, Neil Gaiman and I have been talking at long intervals about a kind of anthology-magazine-type thing. I have no doubt that it will happen eventually, but as yet it's still only very nebulous as far as any practical considerations go. These are my only plans for strictly serious comics work following the end of *Lost Girls*, but they're both pretty ambitious. On top of this, I'll be working on a CD-ROM with Dave Gibbons, finishing my third CD recording (a double album of techno dance music, if anyone's even remotely interested), and working on the follow-up to *Voice of the Fire*, which currently has *A Grammar* as its working title. By the time I've finished with all of the above, I'll probably be pushing fifty. *Cerebus* will be finished. It'll be the twenty-first century, and we'll all be living on the moon and wearing anti-gravity shoes. We'll see how everything stands (or floats) then.

I hope that answers your questions, and sorry that it's taken me so long to reply to this last part. Again, it's been a great virtual conversation, and I can think of no nobler forum than your extraordinary comic book for it to appear in. Incidentally, I only just noticed that the spooky photograph of me that you stuck in the issue preceding the start of our chat is taken from the inner sleeve of *The Moon & Serpent*. Did you finally find a copy, or what?

Anyway, my love, as ever, to you and Ger. *Cerebus* goes from strength to strength, to the point where even running this conversation in issue after issue probably won't completely destroy its reader base. Take care of yourselves, and I'll talk to you soon, although probably not in public.

Peace.

Alan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THE FLOWER WHO CRIED WOLF
HEY GUYS... WANT SOME CAKE?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?
NOTHING'S WRONG WITH IT! IT'S A CAKE!
YOU PUT LEAD IN IT, RIGHT? OR HEROIN, OR DEAD KITTENS?
IT'S A FREAKIN' CAKE!
YEAH, RIGHT...
...AT THE GLOBAL SECURITY HEADQUARTERS...
HE'S SAYING IT'S JUST A CAKE, SIR.
WE CAN'T TAKE THAT CHANCE. ORDER FULL ORBITAL RESPONSE.
MEANWHILE...
...FLOUR, EGGS, SUGAR, LEMON...
UH-HUH. AND NAILS? GOT ANY NAILS IN THAT CAKE?
HEY GUYS - WHAT'S THAT LIGHT IN THE SKY...?
FWAM!
IT'S JUST A CAKE, YOU ASSHOLES!
AND A TASTY CAKE IT IS, TOO!

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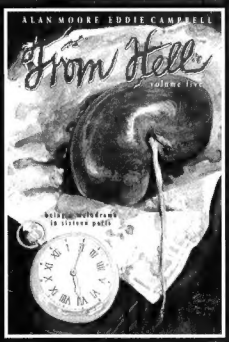

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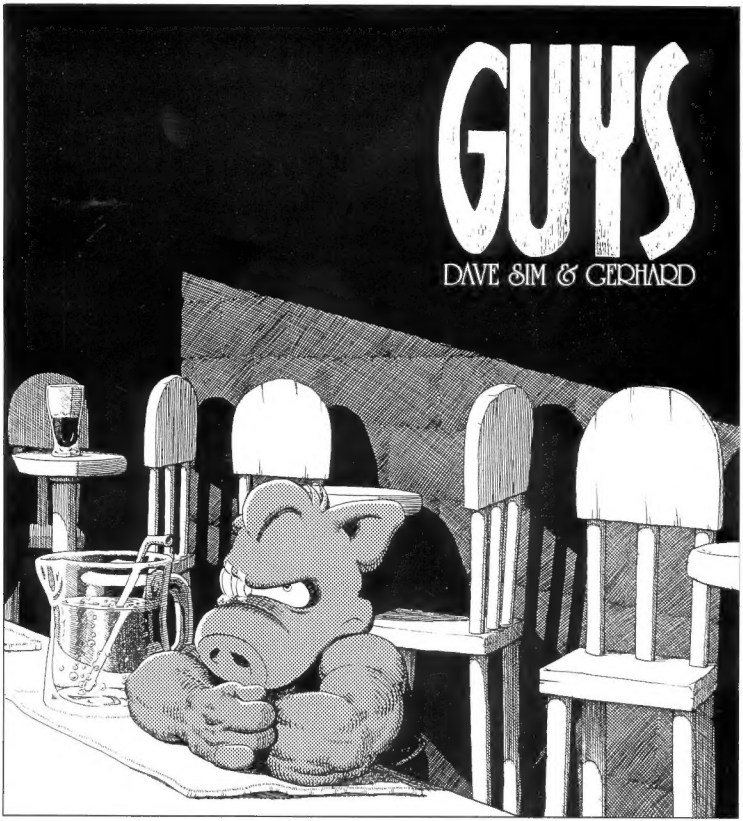

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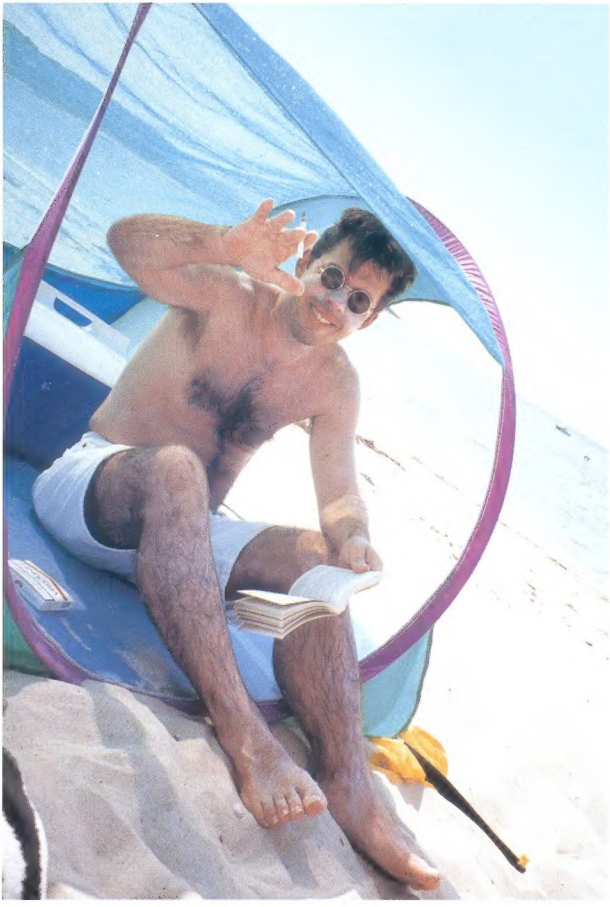

VACATION TIME! Martha's Vineyard, Labour Day Weekend '96, the day before Hurricane Eduard came through.